

Statement Condemning Recent Escalation of Violent Rhetoric Against Sociologist

February 15, 2011

A Response to the Recent Attacks on Professor Frances Fox Piven

For many years, the academic community in the United States has stood firm in its support of scholars across the world who have been threatened or endangered by their scholarship, research, and writing. We must do the same for scholars in the United States.

We, the leadership of major scholarly associations, express our collective outrage at the recent, repeated attacks on Professor Frances Fox Piven. These attacks have been based on rhetoric, rather than substance, and have incited threats of violence, rather than encouraging open debate. Radio and television personality Glenn Beck has accused Professor Piven of creating a plan to “intentionally collapse our economic system,” as reported by The New York Times; and he has included her in a list of the nine “most dangerous people” in the world. While Mr. Beck has not directly called for violence against Professor Piven, his attacks have created a space for threats of violence to emerge. Over the past several months, Professor Piven has received a flood of hate mail and menacing internet postings, including death threats. The Center for Constitutional Rights has identified many violent posts by visitors to Mr. Beck’s website, including the following: “I am all for violence and change Frances: Where do your loved ones live?” The rhetoric has become sufficiently overheated that the potential for physical violence is real.

Dr. Piven, a Professor of Political Science and Sociology at the City University of New York Graduate Center who holds a PhD from the University of Chicago, is one of the nation’s most thoughtful commentators on the country’s social welfare system. She has been elected President of the American Sociological Association, Vice President of the American Political Science Association, and President of the Society for the Study of Social Problems.

We call on public officials, political commentators, and others in the media to help discourage the rhetoric of hate and violence that has escalated in recent months. We vigorously support serious, honest, and passionate public debate. We support serious engagement on the research of Professor Piven and of others who study controversial issues such as unemployment, the economic crisis, the rights of welfare recipients, and the place of government intervention. We also support the right of political commentators to participate in such debates. At the same time, we insist that all parties recognize the rights of academic researchers not only to gather and analyze evidence related to controversial questions, but also to arrive at their own conclusions and to expect those conclusions to be reported accurately in public debates.

Both scholars and commentators, regardless of political orientation, strive to serve the public good. We can only benefit from their work when all parties respect the rights of others to disagree without fear of violent reprisal. We call on all parties to condemn the recent escalation of violent rhetoric, which does nothing to serve democracy.

Signatories

American Anthropological Association

American Council of Learned Societies
American Educational Research Association
American Sociological Association
Association of American Geographers
Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors (BPD)
Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning
Association for Humanist Sociology
Board, American Society of Criminology
Board, Research Committee 19 (Poverty, Social Welfare, and Social Policy) of the International Sociological Association
Board, Society for the Study of Social Problems
Caucus for New Political Science
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Eastern Sociological Society
Linguistic Society of America
Mid-South Sociological Association
Midwest Sociological Society
National Women's Studies Association
Pacific Sociological Association
Planners of Color Interest Group, Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning
Rural Sociological Society
Social Science History Association
Social Science Research Council
Sociologists for Women in Society
Sociologists Without Borders
Southern Sociological Society